

El Salvador: Gender and Environmental Management

Melany Machado, Manuel Benitez, and Mary Hill Rojas

The Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN) in El Salvador requested WIDTECH technical assistance to evaluate existing public and private environmental initiatives in order to develop an action plan to incorporate gender concerns in environmental management. An initial participatory diagnostic study contributed to the plan.

The final report¹ is divided into three sections: (1) the conceptual framework of the diagnostic study; (2) an analysis of how MARN can seek opportunities for gender integration in its operations; and (3) the action plan for gender-sensitive community participation in MARN's environmental management programs and recommendations for implementing the plan. This bulletin is a summary of the report.

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Despite the clear interrelationships among gender, community participation, and environmental management, few institutions have explored the dynamics of these relationships in projects. The attention given to gender issues in policy and program formulation on sustainable uses of natural resources and conservation also continues to be fairly marginal.

A gender focus regards men and women as change agents in improving their own quality of life and that of future generations by analyzing their individual roles in using and preserving the environment. In El Salvador, environmental

degradation is intimately tied to poverty. Women and men have different levels of access to productive resources, which not only has a fundamental effect on their conditions of poverty but also on the use, depletion, and conservation of natural resources. Gender and community participation focuses on both the existing use of natural resources by men and women, and their differentiated needs and potentially unique contributions for sustainable management of the environment.

El Salvador: A Supportive Context

Throughout this decade, El Salvador has provided a supportive context for activities related to community participation and environmental management. Several initiatives promoted by the government, donor organizations, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) examined the participation of women in various aspects of environmental management, including agroforestry, fishing, agribusiness, use of appropriate technologies, and efficient use of soil and water.

In response to international declarations and its own desire to improve the conditions of women, the national government established the Salvadoran Institute for Women's Development in 1996, which, a year later, developed the National Policy on Women. The main mission of the institute is to contribute to the institutionalization of gender issues in all policies developed by government agencies. Regarding the environment, the National Policy on Women has seven strategic objectives guiding various activities.

In 1997 MARN established a Gender, Environment, and Development Unit to ensure the

¹ For the Spanish version of this information bulletin or the full diagnostic study and action plan in Spanish, please contact Mary Hill Rojas at WIDTECH.

incorporation of gender concerns in policies, action plans, programs, and evaluations on environmental management.

The Law on the Environment, effective since mid-1998, has as its objectives to standardize the protection, conservation, and recovery of the environment; to promote sustainable use of natural resources to improve the quality of life for current and future generations; to promote public and private environmental management and protection as a basic obligation of the state, municipalities, and the people; and to enforce the international treaties and agreements signed by El Salvador in this area. The law identifies the National System of Environmental Management (SINAMA) to lead and coordinate environmental management at the national level, supported by environmental units in each ministry as well as other autonomous and municipal agencies. It also defines community participation as a basic condition for environmental management.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GENDER INTEGRATION IN MARN'S OPERATIONS

MARN Management Structure and Processes

Based on the diagnostic study, WIDTECH recommended the following priorities for MARN's Gender, Environment, and Development Unit:

- Develop a policy paper and an action plan on gender and environmental management that will provide both a conceptual and a practical guide for the unit's work.
- Incorporate gender issues into all the activities of various technical and administrative units, with special emphasis on those carried out by the Community Participation and Environmental Education Unit.
- Ensure that the internal guidelines and standards of work that MARN is preparing integrate the principles of gender equity in environmental management.

- Train and sensitize MARN staff through case studies on gender and community participation in environmental management.
- Develop the conceptual and methodological base that will lay the foundation for incorporating a gender perspective into the National Policy and the Regulations on Environment and for identifying gender indicators in the various activities of the technical and administrative units.

Interactions with Internal and External Agencies

Rural and community organizations. In June 1998, 12 rural and community organizations signed an environmental declaration based on the principles of collaboration, peace, institutional strength, and improvement of quality of life based on a healthy environment. The declaration recognizes the peasant as the primary agent in rural environmental management and includes a gender perspective. It proposes community participation as the primary means for the recovery of the environment and the sustainable use of the nation's natural resources. The Rural Environmental Alliance formed as a result of that declaration constitutes a major opportunity for MARN to bring a gender focus into community participation for environmental management.

Donor agencies. Donor agencies have initiated or supported activities that strengthen the incorporation of a gender focus into environmental management. They can be approached to provide technical and financial support to the different thematic areas of the proposed MARN action plan (see below). In this way, the administration of donor support can be implemented in a coordinated and coherent manner under MARN's priorities and guidance.

Government agencies. MARN has the opportunity to incorporate a gender focus into the Law on the Environment as well as the framework of the national environment policy. It can also guide, facilitate, and follow up gender-sensitive activities in the work of the regional environmental

units that form part of SINAMA. MARN also has the opportunity to develop actions directed at implementing the environment-related objectives of the National Policy on Women.

Nongovernmental organizations. MARN can expand its work with gender by interacting with women's organizations and development groups that have significant expertise with gender, community participation, and environmental management. The main areas of work of the 11 NGOs consulted during the diagnostic study, many with gender experience, are training, health and sanitation, environmental education, and conservation of natural resources. MARN can take advantage of these interagency networks in support of its work.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN ACTION PLAN

The diagnostic study led to the following recommendations. These recommendations constitute an action plan for the Gender, Environment, and Development Unit of MARN that incorporates gender issues in community participation and environmental management policies and programs.

Action 1

Develop guidelines for environmental management policies and strategies with a gender and community participation focus.

Recommended Activities:

- Develop a gender focus in the environmental education and community participation activities of MARN and SINAMA.
- Design and implement the policy and action plan on gender and the environment.
- Draft the conceptual background and implementation strategies for incorporating gender issues into the National Policy on the Environment.
- Integrate gender equity into the guidelines and standards that formulate the Law on the Environment.
- Incorporate the gender focus into the guidelines and internal standards of MARN.

- Include gender issues in the selection and evaluation criteria of projects financed by the Initiative for the Americas Fund and the Environmental Fund of El Salvador.

Action 2

Emphasize gender in the institutional development of MARN and SINAMA.

Recommended Activities:

- Identify professionals with gender expertise within MARN and SINAMA who will agree to guide the incorporation of gender issues into the technical and administrative units of MARN and the environmental units of SINAMA.
- Establish a gender committee made up of the gender experts or liaisons in the technical and administrative units of MARN and the environmental units of SINAMA who will promote coherent and systematic attention to gender issues in environmental management.
- Create a registry of professionals and technicians who are able to identify gender issues and indicators in environmental management programs.
- Develop a database and a collection of resource materials on gender and environmental management.

Action 3

Provide technical assistance on gender and the environment for nongovernmental and community organizations.

Recommended Activities:

- Provide technical assistance for nongovernmental and community organizations that have initiatives on gender and environmental management in rural and urban areas.
- Provide technical assistance to integrate gender issues in the design and implementation of the Rural Environmental Action Plan.

Action 4

Provide guidance and follow-up on implementing the actions related to the environment under the National Policy on Women.

Recommended Activities:

- Coordinate activities with the Salvadoran Institute for Women's Development in making sure that actions related to the environment under the National Policy on Women are implemented.
- Coordinate activities that promote access, management, and rational use of water resources in high-priority regions.

Action 5

Facilitate training in gender issues for technical and administrative staff of MARN and environmental staff of SINAMA.

Recommended Activities:

- Develop an institutional training plan on gender and the environment including key issues, data collection strategies, possible program activities, and indicators to monitor results.
- Provide technical assistance to prepare training materials on gender issues in environmental

management with a focus on management and exploitation of water resources.

Action 6

Monitor and evaluate how gender issues have been incorporated into environmental management programs and projects.

Recommended Activities:

- Develop baseline indicators to measure and evaluate the results of gender training as well as the results achieved under gender-sensitive activities in environmental management.
- Create a manual that includes guidelines for incorporating gender issues in environmental management, with an emphasis on the management of water resources.
- Establish procedures for incorporating gender issues into the design, monitoring, and evaluation of environmental management projects within MARN and the regional environmental units of SINAMA.

WIDTECH supports innovative approaches to technical assistance and training that take into account women's roles and contributions and enhance the effectiveness of USAID's development assistance.

Authors: Melany Machado, environment and gender specialist, CEASDES, El Salvador
Manuel Benitez, environment and gender specialist, CEASDES, El Salvador
Mary Hill Rojas, environment specialist, Development Alternatives, Inc.

Translator: Marc Ferrara

Information Bulletin Editor: Tulin Pulley, consultant

To access WIDTECH services, please contact:

Rekha Mehra, Project Director
WIDTECH
1717 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Suite 302
Washington, DC 20036 USA
Tel.: (202) 332-2853 • Fax: (202) 332-8257

Visit
WIDTECH's Web site at: <http://www.widtech.org>